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ABSTRACT

So that the non-English speaking students could grasp the simple rudiments of English composition with any degree of accuracy, the Oscar Rose Junior College developed a two-semester program involving a sequential, syntactical, linguistic, multimedia approach to composition. The four media utilized are talk-tapes, visual-aid cards (minireproductions of the overhead transparencies), vocabulary cards for optional drills and personal reference, and a flexible course of study allowing for individualization. Each unit has its objective clearly outlined in behavioral terms; at the end of each lesson there is a comprehensive self-assessment task; and at the completion of each unit another quiz is provided which includes previous unit skills and/or concepts, along with the current unit objectives. Students who have any problems with the exercises, tasks, or quiz are directed to reread the material and confer with the instructor for supplemental material. Criterion-referenced grading is used to measure each objective. Vocabulary study in the first semester is based on vocabulary drawn from social institutions such as home and family, business, government, and education, while the lessons in the second semester are drawn from terminology and essays concerned with law, medicine, geology, biology, and physics. (HOD)

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YES! INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IS POSSIBLE IN THE CONVENTIONAL CLASSROOM--IT IS A FORMULA FOR "HOLDING POWER."

Ladonna J. Dreyer

"The soul is like a rough diamond; it must be polished before the luster will appear" - Daniel DeFoe. International students are like the "soul" DeFoe is talking about; that is, all their coarseness in articulating the English language must be polished--many need polishing much more than others. In fact, for some, the "luster" is still quite dull for what seems an interminable time. Most instructors have experienced this difficulty, whether teaching foreign students or those American students who find the English language still "foreign" to them. Additionally, if the non-English speaking students are in the conventional classroom situation, one finds such a disparity of cultures, educational levels, and language capabilities that it is almost impossible to know where to begin teaching; that is, at what level, or with what area of concern. Such heterogeniety is even greater than that experienced in a class comprised solely of the English speaking. Thus, when our college created six classes of international students, I was forced to devise a method whereby each student could work at his own pace to some degree, while, at the same time, keeping up with each unit's presentation in the classroom, Hence, I began to formulate mentally a polishing process. Yet to make matters worse, there were no ready materials available to accomplish my instructional objectives in the classroom situation.

Among the primary instructional goals which the composition teacher strives to accomplish for non-English speaking students are those that assure competencies in the areas of reading comprehension, grammatical expression, and expository writing. Even though English is considered as a general educational discipline, it is, indeed, the most important one for international students in an English-speaking country.

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After several semesters of trial and error, I compiled a course of study upon which to base our international English program. However without the encouragement of Dr. R. Eugene Byrd and the aid of Dr. Roy C. Allen, who so willingly gave of their expertise in their respective fields of curriculum development and learning resources, the project would have failed. Additionally, I owe "many thanks" to Dr. Helen J. Throckmorton of Wichita State University who first introduced me to the methods; Dr. Sue Park and Dr. Jim Kidd of West Texas State University who implanted further ideas; Dr. David C. Austin and Edith Smith of the Amarillo Public School System for their encouragement, along with James E. Garrett, Principal of Palo Duro High School in Amarillo, Texas; and last, but most important, my colleagues at Oscar Rose Junior College and Dr. Larry Nutter, Assistant to the President, who was the English Department Chairperson when I was developing this course of study. Not only did Dr. Nutter assign me the biggest problem of my profession, but also patiently listened to my hypothesis and served as an excellent resource person when I needed one most.

RATIONALE

With few exceptions, the non-English speaking student cannot be placed in the same classroom with nationals and be expected to keep up. He has difficulty in areas that the American student has already mastered. He is not ready for a scholarly analysis, criticism, or a detailed study of English semantics. His lack of confidence further impedes his learning. This uncertainty is reinforced even more by the use of a traditional text. Neither the objectives nor the content of the conventional freshman text is suitable for the international student--even if he has passed a TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) with a 500+ score or graduated from most English Language Schools.

Typically, these non-English speaking students have only a "conversational" knowledge of the English language (acquired through listening or, perhaps, a language institute), but such knowledge seldom gives them the capability of "transferring" it into written communication. And, writing well is one of the basic principles of transference of information; it achieves two very important objectives: it transfers thoughts from the writer's mind to the reader's mind with accuracy and precision; it creates within the reader those impressions and reactions that the writer intends. Moreover, it must be remembered that the "conversational" English words that foreign students use orally are unrecognizable to them when seen in printed or written form. Indeed, these students have a great handicap, but once overcome, they can go on to achieve their much-sought-after goals. To master their goals, these students require a minimum of one year of college freshman English to grasp the simple rudiments of English composition with any degree of accuracy; thus, a two semester sequential program is suggested. Academic success for them depends upon being able to read, write, comprehend, and respond in the English language.

RESEARCH

My program is predicated upon the premise that by utilizing these students' main areas of ability, their weaknesses may be lessened or overcome substantially. Research indicates that through dependency upon "listening" and "observation," the foreign student fights for survival in a new country. Hence his hearing and seeing competencies are constantly being reinforced. Tests given to international students at Oscar Rose Junior College by the English Language School Center, a division of Washington Educational Research Associates, Inc., confirm this premise.

In the classroom situation, the student also observes and listens to his instructor for survival--few understanding his greetings--all, however, anxious to know how to understand well enough to learn the complicated English language--to be able both to write and to recite. Thus the search begins for a common denominator to reach "across" all the various languages, diverse cultures and educational backgrounds, as well as the many levels of learning represented in one classroom. While it may be possible to explain a proper noun by pronouncing a student's name repeatedly, unfortunately teaching the composition process is not that simple! The instructor resorts to facial contortions, hand waving, and any other device that may seem workable for oral communication in order for the instructor's objectives to be attained.

From a sampling of their transcripts, the foreign students seem to have a natural aptitude for the language of mathematics and science--thus formulas and symbols. And, after classroom testing several theories, all evidence indicated that syntactical linguistics (formulas and symbols) is the only system which does, indeed, reach out and "across" to bring everyone together in the same starting arena. Thus our two semester program of sequential, syntactical linguistic, multi-media approach to composition became a working project. The four media utilized are (1) talk-tapes, (2) visual aid cards--these are mini-reproductions of the overhead transparencies for the classroom instructor--, (3) vocabulary cards for optional drills and personal reference, and (4) a flexible course of study allowing for individualization. Student involvement is the key to its success.

The international student must be thoroughly saturated with English in all conceivable ways in order to gain maximum benefits. Thus the multi-media approach is not different for the sake of being different; it is different

because it is built upon observations and actual classroom testing of how non-English speaking students can learn best. From a follow-up study, students using the newly-designed syntactical linguistics materials and tapes were at least six weeks ahead of their progress the previous semester. This method of student-involvement frees the instructor for giving drills and for directing the learning process by a less lengthy--often misunderstood--oral presentation. Such supervised classroom assistance has maximum results. Moreover, those needing to hear the tapes over and over, may; those requiring less exposure are free to proceed and refine their learning tasks for more "luster."

PROGRAM

Each unit has its objectives clearly outlined in behavioral terms; each segment of the lesson provides enabling exercises to accomplish these objectives. Then, at the end of each lesson there is a comprehensive self-assessment task. Further, at the completion of each unit, another quiz is provided which includes previous unit skills and/or concepts, along with the current unit objectives. This feedback to the instructor of the student's retention, as well as the reinforcement it affords the student, is invaluable in terms of learning more about his individual needs. If the student has any problems with his enabling exercises, self-assessment tasks, or the unit quiz, he is directed to reread the material, listen to the talk-tapes prepared over each lesson, and/or have a conference with his instructor for more supplemental material to aid him.

GRADING

Criteria-referenced grading is employed by the instructor in order that each specified objective can be measured. If, for instance, the measurement reveals that stipulated objectives four and five were not understood, the

student would be graded over only those he successfully completed. Then he would be advised to go back and reread certain related sections of the unit, do the enabling exercises and self-assessment tasks again, and be ready for reevaluation as soon as possible.

There is a built-in motivation factor which I did not realize when I first employed this method. Seemingly, these students "lose face" among their peers if they do not catch up quickly. Also, once they realize that they are expected to keep on learning and completing the current assignments, each puts forth his best effort to learn what was not understood the first time it was presented. It has been my experience that by the time he has been recycled over two or three assignments, he never needs to be reevaluated over future objectives. Usually, he has learned the basic sequential skills to carry him through the remaining units, and he has also learned how to utilize his study material to gain maximum benefits. These materials are varied enough that certainly one or more different methods of presentation reach him.

MATERIALS

The talk-tapes explain each lesson. These, in effect, do the students' homework. By listening and following along in their course of study, each student learns what the lesson concerns, he acquires explanations of new material, reinforcement of previous material, and he obtains a practical synthesis of skills, content, and concepts up to that point. He is further instructed how to proceed with the assessments and provided with examples for his benefit. Thus, what the native American student can do for himself, the talk-tapes do for the foreign student: he, too, is ready for class. This very informal method of assistance not only helps him to feel successful, but more importantly, he is

prepared to ask questions over areas which, for him, need further explanation. This form of assistance leaves more classroom time for the instructor to conduct a class in a "normal" manner by giving priorities to those areas needing emphasis.

In addition to tapes, the student is provided with visual-aid cards which are mini-reproductions of the instructor's coordinated overhead transparencies. The instructor's copies can be used for further classroom elaboration over any problem area, or for a personal conference. Experience indicates that the international student has a great deal of difficulty copying down notes over overhead presentations while, at the same time, listening. Thus the mini-reproductions serve two purposes: they reduce note taking, allowing for more attention in class; and they serve as a reference guide to material presented on the talk-tapes-providing valuable reinforcement.

The flexible course of study represents a synthesis of newer grammatical patterns, especially transformational, along with those elements of traditional grammar which are useful. In no way is a purely linguistical presentation pursued. The primary purpose for using transformational-generative grammar, as opposed to solely traditional, is that it gives a base for the foreign student from which to begin his learning of a new language. Combined with the more practical areas of traditional grammar, the outcome is impressive. Instead of the student trying to transfer his native tongue, word for word, into the English written language--which is a disaster in any study of language--he learns the formulas and the words for the noun phrase, verb phrase components expressed in symbols, with resultant sentences in a very short time. Each is syntactically correct; at that point, confidence begins and learning insues. Experiments show that these students have the ability to go on and develop topic sentences, paragraphs, and ultimately compositions by first writing the basic sentence from noun phrase, verb phrase paradigms.

In order not to be burdensome, the grammar section of the course of study is limited to two lessons in each of the first three units. The remaining portion of the program emphasizes other components of learning how to write a good composition: punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and paragraphs. The subject matter is broken down into small segments followed by enabling and self-assessment activities to assure that the terminal behavioral objectives are met with a prescribed degree of accuracy. Each unit is predicated upon the learning which has taken place in the preceding one.

For added interest, each unit has a particular discipline emphasis. Few, if any, international students are preparing to be English majors; this precludes a course of study which attempts to exhaust every phase of rhetoric, usage, and composition. Hence, essays and vocabulary concerning various disciplines are used primarily as material for thought provocation and reading comprehension. The first semester work has vocabulary emphasis over some of the social institutions such as home and family, business, government, and education. The rationale for this approach is that while these students are taking concurrent courses in social sciences--although not too articulate in English--they are mature and bright and can be taught English syntax through more sophisticated readings than the simple noun-verb-object presentation of "John ran home." Thus while the student is learning how to write, he is also learning useful terminology and concepts for other college courses. This theory was also classroom tested with unbelievable results! All at once the English class became as a real learning center--a tutor so-to-speak for their other classes. Students began placing prefixes, roots, and suffixes together and asking if they had made a word; some found the same words as studied in their textual material; others began looking in newspapers and periodicals for the "new" words they had learned. Suddenly, they had tools with which to

perform other course work, while they also became more proficient in writing. Even though the vocabulary section is "incidental," it has proven to be an invaluable motivator.

While teaching more about composition, the second semester course of study has five units which utilize terminology and essays concerned with law, medicine, geology, biology, and physics. Like the first semester's sequential lessons, the second semester has the same format with a section on punctuation, spelling and an optional vocabulary. An appendices with principal parts of verbs, paradigms for punctuation, Greek and Latin roots, prefixes and suffixes, and a list of often misspelled words are also included. Hence the student has every conceivable tool at his disposal to gain confidence in himself. English, then, becomes something more than the traditional grammar/writing class. It has another more interesting dimension!

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The complete program is designed to be used with either the two, tri, or quarter semester system. It can be utilized for (1) independent study, (2) classroom plus laboratory study, (3) self-study with minimum instructor assistance, and (4) individualized classroom and laboratory study. Whichever method is employed will result in bringing out the best "luster" possible in any given situation or time span. Naturally, there will be a few who are still in "rough diamond" form, but enough of their edges have been smoothed to give them confidence to pursue their goal. They have also been developing study skills necessary for future independent study and self-improvement.